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THE JOHNS HOPKINS STUDIES IN ROMANCE LITERATURE
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VOLUME XIX

CLAUDE BILLARD

Minor French dramatist of the
early seventeenth century

A Portion of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Board of University Studies
of The Johns Hopkins University
in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
1929

BY

LANCASTER E. DABNEY

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BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
INTRODUCTION	7
I. — Life, Works, and Literary Doctrines	10
II. — Polyxène	25
III. — Guaston de Foix	34
IV. — Mérovée	42
V. — Panthée	49
VI. — Saül	58
VII. — Alboin	68
VIII. — Genève	77
IX. — Henry le Grand	89
X. — Style	99
CONCLUSION	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121
INDEX	127



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INTRODUCTION

Claude Billard, Seigneur de Courgenay, an almost totally unknown dramatist of the early seventeenth century, has never been studied in any detail, although he has been mentioned and parts of his work discussed by a number of critics. The Frères Parfaict list his plays with the hypothetical date of their staging and give a short comment on each with extracts from some of them. (1) The Abbé Goujet (2) echoes the Frères Parfaict, adding, however, some valuable information concerning Billard's life. Beauchamps, (3) Lérès, (4) and the duc de la Vallière, (5) who gives a fairly complete analysis of the plays, are relatively unimportant. Sainte-Beuve (6) gives perhaps the fullest account of their style that we have, while Faguet (7) devotes considerable space to the plays and their author. Rigal (8) touches upon the work of Billard in several places, and discusses his *Panthée* quite fully. Dr. Roth, (9) who in his dissertation on the influence of the *Orlando Furioso* in France treats quite fully Billard's tragi-comedy, *Genèvre*, is one of the few modern critics who speak favorably of

(1) *Histoire du théâtre françois*, Paris, 1745, IV, 109-12, 123, 128-30.

(2) *Bibliothèque françoise*, Paris, 1752, XIV, pp. 391-7; XV, 65.

(3) *Recherches sur le théâtre*, II, 27-29.

(4) *Dictionnaire portatif des théâtres*, Paris, 1754.

(5) *Bibliothèque du théâtre françois*, Dresden, 1768, I, 391-404.

(6) *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au 16^e siècle*, Paris, 1828. Ed. 1842, p. 244.

(7) *La tragédie française au 16^e siècle*, Paris, 1883, p. 326.

(8) In Petit de Julleville, IV, 190, and in Alexandre Hardy et le théâtre français, Paris, 1889, p. 301.

(9) *Der Einfluss von Ariost's Orlando Furioso auf das französische Theater*, Leipzig, 1905, pp. 206-11.

Billard. He finds the choruses of *Genèvre* not without poetical worth. « Meist, » he continues, « in bilderreicher Sprache sich bewegend, beschäftigen sie mit einem dem Inhalt des vorausgehenden Aktes entsprechenden Thema. » (10) He also gives some information which he has gleaned from the sources mentioned above and from J. Madeleine's article on « La Belle Genièvre ». (11)

In an article on the general subject of the influence of the *Orlando Furioso* in France, Pietro Toldo adds a few things to the contribution of Madeleine about Billard. (12) Paul Lacroix, (13) in listing the works of Billard found in the *Bibliothèque de M. de Soleinne*, takes occasion to make a few remarks about the author and the plays. The information given by Lelong, (14) Lebas, (15) Mouhy, (16) and Du Verdier (17) is rather scanty. Frédéric Lachèvre (18) gives a list of Billard's works that is nearly complete, and points out the existence of several poems by Billard in the *poésies liminaires* of other works. Dr. H. Carrington Lancaster (19) speaks of Billard in several of his publications. In his *French Tragi-comedy* (p. 115) he analyzes *Genèvre*, though not so fully as Dr. Roth. In a later article (20) he points out that in the last act of this play is to be found the first known example of *stances* in a French play. In his recent work on the French theater, he adds some details to our knowledge of the man and

(10) *Idem.*, p. 209.

(11) *Revue de la Renaissance*, 1903, pp. 30-46, especially p. 40.

(12) *Bulletin Italien*, IV, 1904, p. 53.

(13) Paris, 1843-4, I, nos. 917-8.

(14) *Bibliothèque historique de la France*, ed. Fontette.

(15) *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la France*, Paris, 1840-45.

(16) *Journal chronologique du Théâtre François* (1220-1773), Mss. fr. 9229-35 at Bib. Nat.

(17) *Les bibliothèques françaises de la Croix du Maine et du Verdier*, Paris, 1772-3.

(18) *Poésies des recueils collectifs généraux et particuliers publiés de 1592 à 1635*, Paris, 1901, I, 116; IV, 71, Paris, 1905.

(19) *The French Tragi-comedy, its origin and development*, Balt., Furst, 1907; *A history of the French dramatic literature in the seventeenth century*, Paris, 1929, part I, pp. 147-9.

(20) "The origin of the lyric monologue", P.M.L.A., XLII, p. 786.

gives a rather full analysis of Billard's *Henry le Grand*. Billard's *Saül* has been considered at some length recently in Dr. Thiel's book on the character of Saul in French dramatic literature. (21)

There is also some slight mention of Billard in an article by Simonne Ratel, « La Cour de la Reine Marguerite, » (22) although nothing is added to our knowledge. Brunet (23) also cites Billard, but has very little to say about him. With the exception of passing mention in articles and histories of literature, this is practically all that has been done on the subject.

The Frères Parfaict and other early critics disdainfully dismissed Billard, and although more recent writers, such as Sainte-Beuve, Faguet, and Rigal, have been more favorable, no one has made a careful analysis of the seven tragedies and the tragi-comedy which have come down to us in the printed form, so that, on the whole, Billard remains an unknown quantity, a dark corner in need of illumination. Only by exploring it can we know whether it hides a treasure or merely empty shadows.

For this reason, it is proposed to make a detailed examination of the plays and their sources and style in an effort to eliminate this gap in our knowledge of the theater. The result will serve, it is hoped, as a part of the material for a definitive history of the drama in this important period, important not because of the quality and number of its dramatic productions, but rather because it is a period of transition from the comparative liberty of form of the sixteenth century to the restrictions of rules and authority initiated by Malherbe in the first part of the seventeenth century.

(21) Amsterdam, 1926.

(22) *Rev. du S. Siècle*, 1925, pp. 12, 17-19, 25, 27.

(23) *Manuel du Libraire...*, Paris, 1860-4.

CHAPTER ONE

LIFE, WORKS, AND LITERARY DOCTRINES

Claude Billard, Sieur de Courgenay, was probably born in 1549 or 1550 at Souvigny near Moulins of a totally unknown family of petty gentry, for in one of his works, *Songe de la guerre*, (1) written evidently in 1609 or 1610 just before the death of Henry IV during the preparations for attacking the House of Austria in which Henry was engaged at the time of his assassination, one finds these lines:

Je ne regrette rien que d'auoir sur ma teste
Six fois dix de ces ans, qui m'exemptent du fer.

If this be taken literally, Billard was sixty years old in 1609 or 1610, and was, consequently, born in 1549 or 1550.

Goujet (2) quotes from the conclusion of *l'Eglise triomfante*:

I'achevoy ces vers saints consacrez à Marie,
Quand les Vénitiens, la Savoye, l'Ibérie
Se trempoyent dans le sang, et que le lys François,
Asyle du Piémont, épouuntoit les Rois:
Lorsque tout rebuté de la fortune adverse,
Et de ce siècle ingrat, du malheur qui traVERSE
Mes vœux et mes desseins, sur l'an soixante & sept,
Je trouuay mon Lynterne ès bois de Courgenet:
Plus riche de lauriers, d'honneur & de mérites,
Que de bienfaits des Rois...

(1) Au Roy par Claude Billard de Courgenay (s. l. n. d.), sig. A-B.

(2) *Op. cit.*, XIV, p. 396. The date of publication is variously given as 1607, 1617, 1618. It is possible that there was more than one edition. Goujet (*op. cit.*, XIV, 391) says that the place of Billard's birth is revealed in the eighth book of *l'Eglise triomfante*.

The privilege of this work, according to Goujet, (3) bears the date 1617, but there is also, he says, an approbation signed in 1607 by Claude Feydeau, «Theologal et Pénitencier de Bourges.»

I am inclined to agree with Goujet's opinion that the expression, « sur l'an soixante & sept, » refers to Billard's age. It is not impossible that this is a mistake or misprint for *seize cent sept*, but in that case it seems impossible to reconcile the reference to the war between Spain, Venice, and Savoy. This war started in 1613 and extended, with intervals of peace, until 1617. If, however, we accept the « soixante & sept » as Billard's age, and the date as 1617 (the date of the privilege according to Goujet), the evidence coincides with that quoted above from *Songe de la guerre*. Another difficulty, however, presents itself, for Billard, in the dedication to *Henry le Grand* (published 1612), refers to his *Eglise triomfante*, which he says he has « parachevé » since 1610. We may explain all of these discrepancies by supposing the poem practically completed (far enough advanced, at least, to receive the approbation of Fedeau) in 1607, that Billard retouched it or prepared it for publication during the period from 1610 to 1612, and that he wrote the verses quoted above, which are a kind of *postscriptum*, in 1617 when he obtained the privilege.

Lachèvre (4) and Goujet, (5) on the basis of the following statement in the dedication of *Saül* by Billard to the Evesque de Paris: « Vos merites, le rang que vous tenez, & l'honneur que i'ay eu d'auoir esté nourry de ceste genereuse Dictynne, (6) feu Madame la Duchesse de Retz vostre mere..., » have assumed that Billard was reared in the household of the duchesse de Retz, but it is rather doubtful that they have correctly interpreted the word *nourry*. The duchesse de Retz was born in 1543, so that she could

(3) *Op. cit.*, XIV, p. 397.

(4) *Bibliographie des recueils collectifs de poésie publiés de 1597 à 1700*, Paris, Leclerc, I, p. 116.

(5) *Op. cit.*, XIV, p. 391.

(6) A name commonly given to the duchesse de Retz. See Jodelle, Marty-Laveaux edition, II, 378.

scarcely have served as guardian to Billard, who could have been, at the most, but ten years younger. It seems to me, therefore, that the word could be more logically explained as meaning that the duchesse patronized Billard as a poet according to her practice with other poets and the fashion of the day, or that he held some office in her household. (7)

It appears that Billard fought in the religious wars of the last half of the sixteenth century on the side of the Catholics, (8) and since he laments in verse the death of the duc de Joyeuse at the battle of Coutras in 1587, (9) it is not improbable that Billard was there also. In this publication, it is also stated that the author is « conseiller esleu pour le Roy en Bourbonnais,» but how long he kept this position we do not know.

The following year (1588) he published another little book of verse of thirty pages, *L'Hymne de Victoire sur la Deffaitte & la Reddition des Reytres*. (10) This volume includes, in addition to the twenty-three pages of the hymn, some sonnets and Latin verses by Billard and others.

In 1605 Billard published a verse account of the *Voyage de la Royne Marguerite en sa maison de Bologne*. (11) This is significant in that it gives us reason to surmise that Billard was at this date already in her service. We know that he was at one time in her employ, for he signs his last published work, *l'Eglise triomfante* (1617), as « con-

(7) Beauchamps, *op. cit.*, II, 28, suggests that Billard may have been a page in the household of the duchesse de Retz. The presence of Billard as a poet at the salon of the duchesse is attested by evidence discovered by M. Roger Sorg in *Cassandre ou le secret de Ronsard*. See below page 13.

(8) This is asserted by Goujet, *op. cit.*, XIV, p. 391, but the only justification seems to be a statement, in the dedication to the "Reyne Regente" of *Henry le Grand*, that his muse "peust parler des armes, comme les ayant portées". In the *Au Lecteur* of the 1610 edition of the plays, Billard speaks of having "des preneurs des Chrestiens aux fesses" while composing his plays.

(9) *Vers funebres françois et latins sur le vrai discours de la mort de M. le duc de Joyeuse*, Paris, Gilles Beys, 1587.

(10) Paris, L. le Magnier, 1588.

(11) Paris, L. le Magnier, 1605.

seiller & Secrétaire des commandemens de la Reine Marguerite.»

In the latter part of 1609 and in the early months of 1610, all France was stirred by the expectation of war. Inspired by this excitement, Billard composed and published, presumably before the death of the king, the work called *Songe de la guerre*, to which we have already referred. This was followed in 1610, probably immediately after the assassination of Henry, by *Larmes sur la tombe de tres grand, tres victorieux, tres Chrestien roy de France et de Navarre Henry III*, (12) dedicated to the queen, in which he describes the assassination.

Lachèvre (13) has noted four pieces by Billard among the *poésies liminaires* of the works of others. The first of these, possibly the earliest of Billard's published verse, appeared in the *Isabelle* of Ant. Math. de Laval, Paris, 1576. The other pieces are to be found among the verses of *Les Bains de Bourbon-Lancy et Larchambault* by J. Auberi, Paris, 1604; in the *Jardin d'Apollon et de Clemence* (in two books) by Estienne Bournier, Moulins, 1606; and in *La défaite de l'Amour et autres œuvres* de V. D. S. (Vital d'Audiguer, seigneur de Menor), Paris, 1606.

The text of one poem and the existence of another by Billard have been recently revealed in a rather curious fashion by M. Roger Sorg. (14) He speaks of the existence of a salon at the home of Catherine de Clermont, maréchale de Retz, of which he learned through a little booklet preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale (ms. fr. 25455). This booklet contains, according to Sorg, the « texte des remerciements rimés par Hélène lorsque Ronsard (dit « Billard » chez la maréchalle) la qualifia de « Soleil » et lui donna le surnom de « Minerve ». The identification of Billard with Ronsard is certainly very flattering, but it is

(12) Paris, Rolin Thierry, 1610, 16 pages.

(13) *Op. cit.*, *Supplément*, IV, 71, Paris, 1905.

(14) *Cassandre ou le secret de Ronsard*, Paris, Payot, 1925, pp. 235-7; *Excelsior*, 27 août, 1922. See the review of Dr. H. C. Lancaster in M. L. N. for June, 1929, and his article in R. H. L., oct.-déc. 1929, in which M. Sorg's identifications are shown to be erroneous.

quite certain that M. Sorg is mistaken. He evidently was unaware of the dedication of Billard's *Saül*, in which he speaks of having been *nourry* by the duchesse de Retz. M. Sorg also appears to be ignorant of the fact that Billard was born in 1550 and that he was rather old when he published his tragedies in 1610. The text of the poem bears out the identity of Billard:

Réponse à quelques stances de Billard, par Minerve (15)

Par trois ou quatre fois j'ai pris la plume en main
Et par autant de fois je l'ai abandonnée.
Or devine, Billard, qui me rend étonnée?
C'est pour connaître en toi un esprit plus qu'humain.
Je reconnais aussi que je travaille en vain,
Ma jeune muse étant encor si peu fondée
Pour m'adresser à toi, le parfait de l'Idée,
Qui pris ton être au ciel sous un Astre divin.
Dis-moi, pensais-tu donc me rendre plus superbe,
Me feignant un Soleil, me nommant ta Minerve?
Non, non, je ne mérite avoir tant de faveurs.
C'est toi qu'on peut nommer, sans mentir je pense,
L'Apollon de ce temps, l'Homère de la France,
C'est à toi, mon Billard, que sont dus ces honneurs.

Réponse à Minerve

Minerve, c'est plutôt aux rais de ta beauté
Que sont dus ces honneurs, vu la gloire immortelle
Que mérite l'esprit d'une nymphe si belle
Et ta grâce conjointe à la divinité
Soit Minerve ou Soleil, nom par toi mérité,
Soit un titre plus beau, ta divine étincelle
Qui sur tant de beautés heureusement excelle
Mérite encore plus en son éternité.
Tu es une Minerve, un Soleil de nos dames,
Parangon de beauté, rare élite des âmes,
Des Muses la dixième et l'honneur des Français.
Si je dis rien de bon, par toi je le puis dire,
Comme on voit par son frère heureusement reluire
Diane, l'heure du ciel, des enfers et des bois.

(15) M. Sorg asserts that these verses were written by Hélène, basing his assumption on the fact that Ronsard calls her "Minerve" in sonnets (Laumonier edition, I, 259, first sonnet, and I, 286). It seems evident that Minerve is here Mme de Retz; cf. Raynaud, p. 66, where she is called Minerve. Notice that these verses are in reply to *stances*, not a sonnet.

The text of the reply makes the identity of Minerve and Mme de Retz almost certain, the appellation of « Dixième Muse » having been given her by several of the poets of the Pléiade. (1) It is true that if M. Sorg were correct *in the identification of Minerve with Ronsard's Hélène and Billard with Ronsard, the date might be established as roughly 1574. In that case, the duchesse de Retz could scarcely have written the response to Billard, for she would have been too old to speak of her « jeune muse, » but there being no evidence to support the identification with Ronsard and Hélène, there is no reason to think that these poems could not have been written earlier or later. The earlier we place the date of composition, the more reasonable appears the identification of the duchesse, and the later the more reasonable the application to Billard of the terms, « Apollon » and « Homère ».

A manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale (ms. fr. 15781, fol. 189) contains a Latin poem in praise of a king, probably Henry IV, and a French imitation of it. Both are by Billard, but since they have no dates, we are unable to say just when they were written.

In 1610 Billard published at Paris a collection of seven plays, six tragedies and one tragi-comedy, which he had evidently composed somewhat earlier. (17) Then, when Henry IV was murdered, Billard set to work at once upon another tragedy based upon the assassination. (18) This play was added to the second edition of the plays in 1612. (19)

(16) Pontus de Thyard, Marty-Laveaux ed., p. 176, sonnet XV, speaks of her, "Comme dixième muse et comme quarten grace". In the *épître* at the beginning of his *Solitaire premier*, he says that he could not have chosen "une dame plus comparable aux Muses".

(17) Paris, Denys Langlois, 1610, They include *Polyxène*, *Guaston de Foix*, *Mérovée*, *Panthée*, *Saül*, *Alboin*, *Genèvre*. *Henry le Grand* was published in the edition of 1612.

(18) The tragedy, *Henry le Grand*, must have been composed in 1610, for in the dedication to the Reyne Regente, Billard says, "Il y a deux ans que ceste tragedie et moy eusmes l'honneur d'estre esclairez des rayons de vos beaux yeux".

(19) Paris, F. Huby. Some of the copies bear the date 1613.

In the dedication of this tragedy to the queen mother, Billard refers to his heroic poem, *L'Eglise triomfante*: « Mon poëme Heroïque de l'Eglise triomfante, que i'ay parachevé depuis, & le peu fortuné succes de mon voyage m'en ont diverty plus long temps que ie ne devois... » Since this is his excuse for not having published the play, which had been composed in 1610, it appears that the heroic poem was finished in the interval from 1610 to 1612. This poem, perhaps the most ambitious of all Billard's works, draws inspiration for its ten thousand verses from the Bible, from mythology, and perhaps from the religious struggles of the day. It was probably published in 1618, but there is some confusion about the date. (20)

The first stanzas of this poem (21) would lead us to think that Billard began his poetic career at an earlier date than his extant publications would indicate, and that he spent at least a part of his time at court. They also reinforce our conclusions as to his identity with the Billard whom M. Sorg confused with Ronsard:

Sillé des vanités, de l'âge & de la Cour,
 J'ai chanté deux beaux yeux, enchanté de l'Amour:
 Ravi de la fureur des Vierges hypocraines,
 J'ai immortalisé les plus grands Capitaines,
 Et graué valeureux le nom de la valeur,
 Sur les plus saints Autels du Temple de l'honneur.
 Sous un mâle courage, & d'une voix hardie
 J'ay tonné dans mes vers, fait voir la Tragédie
 Braue sur le théâtre en son parler François,
 N'emprunter que le nom du Cothurne Grégeois.
 Tout cela vanité; le déclin de mon âge
 Cherche d'autres lauriers, élève mon courage
 D'une flame plus vive, et fait luire à mon œil
 Autre amour, autres feux, autres rais du soleil.

(20) Paris, Claude Morillon, 1617, according to Lachèvre, *op. cit.*, I, 116; Toinet, *Essai d'une liste alphabétique raisonnée...*, I, 46, says Lyon, Morillon, 1607; Goujet, *op. cit.*, XIV, p. 391, says at Lyons, 1618; 1607 as the date of publication is evidently a mistake, for Billard's statement in the dedication of *Henry le Grand*, quoted above, excludes this possibility.

(21) Quoted by Goujet, *op. cit.*, XIV, 391.

The last of these stanzas and another taken from the end of the same poem :

Lorsque tout rebuté de la fortune adverse,
Et de ce siècle ingrat, du malheur qui traaverse
Mes Vœux et mes desseins, sur l'an soixante et sept,
Je trouuay mon Lynterne ès bois de Courgenet :
Plus riche de lauriers, d'honneur & de mérites,
Que de bienfaits des Rois, que mes braues Carites
Ont immortalisés : mais on ne m'a rendu
Qu'un regret d'un long-tems si vainement perdu ;
Chargé de neuf enfans, sans pension aucune,
Office ny bienfait, ie dis à la fortune
Adieu pour jamais, & n'espère plus rien, etc.,,

reveal the disappointment of the aged courtier, who like Spenser had found « what hell it is in suing long to bide.» He is perhaps also a bit jealous of the success of the younger poets. This jealousy is revealed in even greater degree in the *Au Lecteur* of the volume of 1610 :

Sortez moy ces petits cajoleurs de Cour à simple tonsure de Minerue, qui sont les scauans, & les Aristarques ès compagnies où l'on n'y entent pas finesse : qui pensent surhausser leur vaine gloire par le mespris des plus honorables Manes des champs-Elysées... Sortez moy dis je ces fustes desarmées, ces Colosses inanimes, ces balons enflez de vent, hors de leurs petits lieux communs, pour les faire voguer sur vn grand Ocean de dix mille vers...

Of Billard's nine children, we know the names of only two: Claude Billard de Courgenay, born around 1695, gave evidence at the age of 16 of being almost as promising a poet as his father; (22) Antoine Billard has left only his name and four lines of Latin addressed to his father. (23)

We have no definite information concerning the date of Billard's death. Goujet (24) conjectures that he died shortly after 1618, and Lachèvre (25) asserts without reservation that he died in 1618, but cites no evidence to prove his statement. It is almost certain that Billard was alive

(22) See the *poésies liminaires* of the volume of 1610.

(23) See the page before the privilege in the edition of 1610.

(24) *Op. cit.*, XIV, 397.

(25) *Op. cit.*, I, 116.

in 1617, the probable date of the publication of the *Eglise triomfante*, his latest extant publication, and that he was sixty-seven or eight years old at the time. With no evidence to the contrary, it is just as logical to surmise that he lived on for several years in retirement at Courgenay on his estate, regretting the vanity of his youth and criticizing the literary fashions of the day, but we have no record or mention of him after 1617 until the publication of the *Histoire du théâtre* of the Frères Parfaict. (26)

From Billard's various writings and prefaces it is possible to get a very good idea of the man's disposition. He had perhaps been rather frivolous in his youth, as we may judge from the stanzas quoted above. What he tells us of himself there would also lead us to believe that he later became more serious and religious, upholding the church in his *Eglise triomfante*. As pointed out above, he was somewhat embittered by his ill success and by the favor of others with Henry IV. (27)

A striking trait of his character is his naive vanity, which he expresses in several places, but nowhere more forcibly than in the dedication of *Henry le Grand*. He excuses himself for not having published the play sooner,

puis que ny les Lauriers tres-florissans, ny les desplorables Cipres du plus grand et victorieux Monarque de l'Vniuers, ne deuoient estre chantez d'une Muse moins releuee que la mienne, qui peust parler des Armes comme les ayant portées: des Rois plus valeureux, pour auoir l'ame Royale, & non moins accompagnée de valeur en ce qui regarde le seruice deu aux Majestez.

As has already been pointed out, Billard published in 1610 a volume containing six tragedies: *Polyxène*, *Guaston de Foix*, *Mérovée*, *Panthée*, *Saül*, and *Alboin*, and one tragi-comedy, *Genèvre*. It is reasonable to suppose that all

(26) We cannot too strongly emphasize the fact that no one has yet discovered any source of information concerning Billard other than what he says about himself in his works, prefaces, etc.

(27) It is possible that he is aiming at Malherbe when he says in his *Au Lecteur* that he is "fort éloigné de l'humeur noire, & fascheuse, d'un tas de foux melancholiques, plus ambitieux du nom de simples Grammairiens, & de rimeurs, que de la sacrée fureur de Poète".

of these plays were not composed in the year of publication, but one must not be misled by the systematic distribution of dates by the Frères Parfaict, who say that the first three were staged in 1607, the next two in 1608, and the last two in 1609. Although this convenient arrangement is accepted by Goujet and Lachèvre, it is not at all certain that the plays were ever produced at all, for we have no positive evidence of the fact, nor does Billard himself say that his plays were acted. He does say in the dedication of *Henry le Grand*, « Il y a deux ans, que ceste tragedie et moy, eusmes l'honneur d'estre esclairez des rayons de vos beaux yeux, » but this probably means only that the queen read the tragedy or that Billard showed it to her.

The stanzas quoted above may throw some light on the matter. From these it would appear that Billard began by writing love poetry, (28) and that later he specialized in the praise of « les plus grands capitaines, » exemplified in the verses on the death of the duc de Joyeuse. Still later, probably after 1587, he began to write his tragedies, composing them amid the campaigns of the civil wars, with, as he picturesquely expresses it, « des preneurs de Chrestiens aux fesses. » When he found that his dramatic efforts did not meet with extraordinary success, he probably decided to spend the declining years of his life in a more serious task, his heroic poem.

In 1610, when Billard published his tragedies, he found himself somewhat out of place, for he belonged to a literary tradition that was beginning to grow old. (29) His literary ideals are those of the sixteenth century and a corruption of those of the Renaissance. He does not proclaim himself a follower of Garnier, but of Ronsard, whom he, as well as Mlle de Gournay, defends energetically. (30) In the *Au*

(28) We have no examples of this part of his work except the poem published by M. Roger Sorg.

(29) Faguet, Emile, *La tragédie française au seizième siècle*, Paris, 1883, p. 326.

(30) Faguet, Emile, *Petite histoire de la littérature française*, Collection Gallia, p. 140.

Ferdinand Brunot, *La doctrine de Malherbe d'après son commentaire sur Desportes in Annales de l'Université de Lyon*, I, p. 549,

Lecteur of the edition of 1610 he speaks of Ronsard as « ce grand Ronsard, le Phoenix, l'Apollon, & l'vnique Prince des meilleurs Poètes de la France,» and satirizes those who have forsaken him.

In 1610 also, the imitators of the Greek and Latin tragedy, Jodelle, Grévin, Garnier, had begun to lose their popularity. The language had changed considerably and the several companies actually presenting plays had somewhat changed the conception of dramatic form. As yet, however, nothing had arisen to supplant the old drama, nor had any great genius supplied a new model. Malherbe, born five years later than Billard, had indeed begun his literary career at almost the same time as our author and his influence had been increasing throughout the reign of Henry IV, but he was not to reach the height of his ascendancy until the regency and the reign of Louis XIII.

On the other hand, Ronsard had died in 1585, and most of the great literary figures of the sixteenth century passed from the scene toward the end of the century. Only d'Aubigné lived on for some time. The only surviving dramatist of the old school of any importance was Montchrétien. Alexandre Hardy, representing a different and more practical school, was, however, at the height of his powers.

Billard may be considered, in some degree at least, as a follower of Garnier and his school, although, as said above, he announced himself as a direct adherent of Ronsard. With the exception of Montchrétien, Billard excels the other imitators of Garnier. The names of most of them are deservedly even more forgotten than his: Chantelouve, Nicolas de Montreux (Olénix du Mont Sacré), Adrien d'Amboise, Jean de Beaubreuil, Godard, Behourt, Jean de Virey.

Billard has a certain number of traits of style in common with Garnier, Grévin, and Montchrétien, and his idea of tragedy was not unlike that of these dramatists. It is the

Paris, 1891, points out Billard's opposition to Malherbe and his defense of Ronsard, quoting a good portion of the introduction to the edition of Billard's plays of 1610.

conception of the sixteenth century, which found tragedy in a bloody, terrible, pathetic spectacle; the pathos was in direct proportion to the amount of blood shed and the exalted rank of the persons involved. He realizes that the ideas of his contemporaries on this subject are beginning to change, and defends himself:

Quand aux sujets de mes tragédies, tel les voudra dire peu tragiques, au moins quelques vns, auquel ie sçauray bien clorre la bouche, luy apprenant, s'il ne le sçait, qu'oà il y a effusion de sang, mort, & marque de Grandeur, c'est vraie matiere tragique: si l'on ne desiroit, pour l'auoir plus sanglante, exterminer toute vne nation... (31).

Billard is also greatly influenced by Seneca, so that his plays are filled with long-winded monologues and vain rhetoric, «full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.» (32)

In order to conform to the *medias res* as interpreted by the dramatists of the sixteenth century, (33) Billard usually begins his plays near the crisis, so near in fact that he often has not enough matter for the usual five acts. In such cases, he introduces a long monologue (34) by a ghost or a fury (35) and fills in with extraneous material: either entirely unrelated plots or irrelevant episodes. (36)

Somewhat reactionary in regard to the literary tendencies of his day, and holding, as we have seen, to the theories of

(31) *Au Lecteur*, ed. 1610, p. vii, verso.

(32) Billard might well have claimed the championship in the length of his monologues. It is perhaps in response to a criticism that he writes, "Je t'aduoueray encor' auoir parfois rendu mes monologues un peu longs: non que ie sois si mauuais cappitaine que ie ne sache fort bien me retrancher dans vne meschante place, lors que le temps, & la necessité le requierent: mais par ce qu'ils sont la naïfue representation de nos pensées, nos esperances, & nos desseins, qui bien souuent nous entretiennent plus longtemps qu'une simple tirade de cent, ou deux cents vers". (*Au Lecteur* of edition of 1610).

(33) Jean de la Taille, *l'Art de la tragedie*, Werner ed., p. 12 (f. 4), states that a tragedy should begin near the end. Cf. Rigal, *Alex. Hardy et le théâtre français*, p. 301.

(34) The first act of each play is a monologue followed by a chorus.

(35) Ghost of Achilles in *Polyxène*, Tysiphone in *Mérovée*, the shade of Totila in *Alboin*, Satan in *Henry le Grand*.

(36) The Elycie plot and the revolt and punishment of Sysulph in *Alboin*, the Cardinal de Médicis and Guaston's sister in *Guaston de Foix*.

Ronsard and Garnier, Billard made perhaps the last effort to revive the dying school by seeking new fields for tragedy. This effort is shown most forcibly in the variety of his subjects: *Polyxène* comes from Seneca, that is, antiquity; *Guaston de Foix* comes from Guicciardini's account of a recent event in French history; *Mérovée*, from Gregory of Tours and the *Grandes Chroniques* of Saint Denis, early French history; *Panthée*, from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, an idealized Persian history; *Saül* comes from the Old Testament; Alboin is taken from the *Historia Langobardorum* of Paulus Diaconus; *Genèvre* is a well known episode of the *Orlando Furioso*; and *Henry le Grand* is the dramatization of a strictly contemporary event.

Faguet (37) praises Billard for this effort to enlarge the field of tragedy, but feels that the effort, though real, does not go far enough and that he has obvious faults — emptiness, lack of unity, and the artificial paraphernalia of the classical tragedy from 1550 to 1600: dreams, nurses, confidants, monologues, and choruses. In spite of these faults, however, the plays, Faguet continues, have some value. They are really elegies in dialogue, « mais en tant qu'élégies, elles ont de la force quelquefois, » and « quelques traits de sentiment presque naturels. » *Panthée*, Faguet thinks, is the best play, for « elle contient quelques élégies, qui étant en situation, sont d'un grand effet. » The scene in which *Panthée* kills herself, he thinks especially good. He also finds that Billard at times carefully suppresses all action in the first four acts in order to put a little into the fifth, as in *Panthée* and *Guaston de Foix*.

Billard's style Faguet considers the weakest part of his work, for it is a mixture of what he calls the « mauvais goût classique, » the abuse of mythology, false elegance, periphrastic disguises, with the love of *pointes* and insipid gallantry peculiar to the court of Henry IV. Nevertheless, he concludes, « Parmi tout ce fatras, ce rimeur a quelque sentiment de poésie, son pittoresque n'est pas toujours banal. Il a quelquefois l'image sobre et vive, qui frappe, qu'on retient. »

(37) *La tragédie française au XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1883, p. 326.

None of the opinions of the others who have written about Billard have been so favorable. Most critics have been too severe, a severity due in part, perhaps, to the disdainful expression of the Frères Parfaict, the first to comment upon the tragedies, who, in speaking of the naive boastfulness of the dedication of *Henry le Grand*, remark that « Billard aurait mieux fait de s'en tenir à ces belles et rares qualités, sans se mêler de faire des pièces si détestables, qu'il est presque impossible d'en soutenir la lecture. » (38) This judgment is echoed by Goujet, while Beauchamps points out Billard's unjustified vanity. (39)

Rigal, prejudiced perhaps by his admiration for Hardy and his opinion that Hardy's plays were the only ones acted in the period, writes under the title, *Dernières tragédies faites pour être lues*: « Le plus curieux [of the successors of Montchrétien] est Claude Billard. [The names of the tragédies are given, with the date of publication of *Henry le Grand* as 1613] ...influencé peut-être par Hardy, il lui est arrivé de mettre quelque mouvement dans ses cinquième actes; mais comme tout le reste est vide et démodé!» (40)

This idea that the tragedies of Billard were written to be read and not produced (41) is not original with Rigal, for it had been previously expressed by Sainte-Beuve:

Nous pensons... que Montchrétien et Billard, par exemple, destinaient les leurs à l'impression plutôt qu'à la représentation. Ces deux auteurs, les derniers et les plus remarquables assurément des disciples de Garnier, intéressent encore aujourd'hui, Montchrétien par une certaine élégance et douceur de style qui lui est particulier, et Billard par l'incohérence grotesque qui souvent éclate entre la forme et le fond de ses compositions. Sa tragédie de la *Mort d'Henry IV*, écrite dès l'année même qui suivit la catastrophe, peut donner une idée de la *Colignade*, de la *Guisiade* et toutes ces tragédies politiques

(38) *Histoire du théâtre françois*, IV, p. III.

(39) *Recherches sur le théâtre*, II, 27.

(40) In Petit de Julleville, IV, 190.

(41) We know, however, that some of Montchrétien's plays were acted, so that it is not proved that Billard's plays were not staged also.

dans lesquelles les événements du jour étaient taillés en drame sur le patron de Sophocle et d'Euripide (42).

Paul Lacroix is somewhat surprised to find that *Henry le Grand* is not a bad play at all, and he is especially impressed^{||} with the accuracy of the historical details. (43)

Although Billard is comparatively unknown, he has been recognized by some of the leading critics to have a certain importance, especially in his own period, and he has, on the whole, been more generally neglected than he deserves. His importance is, however, rather historical than intrinsic, for he is a concrete illustration of the reason for the disappearance of those who followed the example of Garnier.

(42) *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1828, ed. 1842, p. 244.

(43) *Bib. de M. de Soleinne*, part I, vol. I, nos. 917, 918.

CONCLUSION

The influence of Billard is quite negligible. The surest indication of this fact is that none of the later plays on the same subjects as Billard's exhibits any certain evidence that the authors were acquainted with his work. (1)

As was pointed out in the introduction, Billard was, in 1610, with the exception of Montchrétien, the most important follower of Garnier. His real rival was probably not Montchrétien, nor Hardy, but a court poet, Nicolas Chrestien, Sieur des Croix. Since the works of the two men have certain differences as well as several traits in common, a comparison of the two writers may enable us to form a better idea of Billard's relation to his time. The fact that both have a play on the subject of Alboin, the king of the Lombards makes it possible to compare them in a more concrete fashion.

This Chrestien des Croix must have enjoyed considerable favor with Henry IV, for he is the author of the translation of the *Ravissement de Cefale* (2) which was presented at the wedding of Henry IV to Marie de Médicis at Florence. Thus he might well have been Billard's rival for the court favor, from which, the latter complains, he received so little profit.

We know even less of his life than of Billard's. He was a Normand of Argentan, (3) but when he was born and when he died, we do not know. His dramatic work consists

(1) We may possibly except from this Du Rocher's *Indienne Amoureuse* (*supra* p. 84) and *Frédégonde et Brunehaut* of Lemercier.

(2) From the Italian of Gabriel Chiabrera: Parfaict, IV, 117 and Soleinne, part I, vol. I, 923.

(3) Soleinne, I, i, 923; Parfaict, IV, 113-17 and 176; Toinet, 99; Goujet, XIV, 253; *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, 1859, p. 741.

of several plays of various genres. He, as well as Billard, sought variety in his sources: *Les Portugais Infortunés*, based upon a tale of shipwreck and disaster taken from *l'Histoire des Indes* of Père Massée, is quite different in tone from plays in the strict classical tradition; *Amnon et Thamar*, remarkable chiefly for its rather disgusting treatment of an unpleasant subject, continues in an unusual manner the tradition of Biblical tragedies; *Les Amantes ou la grande pastorale* has, in addition to the conventional matter of the *genre*, a complication of incident worthy of a tragi-comedy and characters and scenes resembling those of the farce; and *Alboüin*, rather more serious than most of the others, has the same source as Billard's *Alboin*. It is evident, even from this brief statement, that in addition to variety of source and subjects, the Sieur des Croix has achieved quite a diversity of tone and manner, qualities almost lacking in the plays of Billard, which are all cut out by the same pattern.

A comparison of the work and methods of the two men can be most effectively initiated through the tragedies on Alboin, and since the tragedy of Chrestien des Croix is not readily available, I may be excused for giving a somewhat detailed analysis in order to bring out the difference in method employed by the two dramatists. (4)

I. 1. Comonde, the father of Rosemonde, the wife of Alboin, having been murdered by his son-in-law, the dead man's shade angrily demands vengeance upon his murderer from the fury Tysiphone. He is especially incensed by the fact that Alboin has made a drinking cup from his skull. Tysiphone promises full satisfaction, but predicts the same fate for Rosemonde. She then gives Comonde some bottles of blood, which mean death when spilled, and foretells the events of the play, much as Tysiphone in Billard's *Mérovée*.

2. The eunuch, Narcez, holds himself up as an example of the ingratitude of countries to brave and worthy men. That Sophia, the wife of Justinian, should have given Narcez' rank to Longinus and ordered the former to spin

(4) The edition used is that of Rouen, Theodore Reinsart, 1608.

with women, has so aroused the eunuch that he has come again to ask the aid of Alboin, who had once crossed the Adriatic to help him conquer the Goths (210 lines).

A chorus of the soldiers of Narcez closes the act with a classical commonplace about the instability of fortune:

Bute du sort fatal nous sommes,
Et ne nous pouuons asseurer,
De voir vn d'entre tous les hommes
Long tems en bon heur demeurer.
Souuent Dieu les grands precipite
Pour les plus petits eleuer,
Ainsi la fortune dépîte
Ne deuons trop dure treuuer.

II. 1. Narcez, after reminding Alboin of the defeat of Totila and the Goths, the conquest of the Zepides, and the capture of Rosemonde, asks for aid against Rome. Alboin boasts of the courage of his troops, and sends Pérédée to order the army to prepare to set out at once.

The soldiers in chorus express their readiness, and Narcez is delighted at the prospect of vengeance.

2. Rosemonde thanks God that Alboin has fallen in love with her and that she has become his wife. As she is talking, Alboin comes to tell her of his proposed expedition. All of his officers, except Guerbin, who favors peace, are for starting at once.

The chorus relates the past history of the Lombards and predicts greater glories for them in the future.

III. 1. Rosemonde boasts of her greatness, but is fearful of a reverse of fortune. She finally confesses to her companion, Polycrite, that her father, Comonde, has appeared to her in a dream, and asked her to take vengeance upon Alboin. Then follows a long discussion, quite in the classical tradition, of the value of dreams. (5)

2. Even as Alboin talks of his various conquests and of his nephew, who has been made Duke of Venice, he is troubled by a vague premonition of disaster. His officers, Guerbin, Almachilde, and Pérédée, notice his pensiveness, and Guerbin proposes a general festival in order to restore

(5) Cf. *Guaston de Foix*, acte V.

his spirits. Alboin invites all of his chiefs, and Guerbin is sent to bring Rosemonde.

The chorus asserts that the great are not to be envied in spite of their apparent happiness, for « en ouurant les cachots de son ame, On treuuerait qu'un montgibel l'enflame, Dauantage qu'un malheureux. »

IV. 1. Bitterly reproaching herself for having for so long suffered Alboin to insult her father by drinking from his skull, Rosemonde relates to Polycrite that Alboin has just made her drink at the banquet « with her father » from the skull cup. In order that she may have revenge, Rosemonde sends Polycrite for Almachilde, and while she is gone discusses in a monologue her plans. When Almachilde arrives, Rosemonde tells him that she loves him and wishes to make him king in the place of her husband. Almachilde not only offers no resistance, but declares his willingness to murder Alboin and commit even viler deeds to please her. He suggests soliciting the aid of Pérédée.

Pérédée is unwilling ; when he threatens to report the plot to the king, Almachilde pretends to change his mind, and Rosemonde at once sends her maid, to arrange a rendezvous with Pérédée. Pérédée has been the lover of this maid, Barcée, for some time, so that, not suspecting his mistress of duplicity, he agrees to meet her in the queen's dressing room.

Polycrite, alone on the stage, reveals to the audience her suspicion that Rosemonde is plotting something against the king. As Polycrite sees Rosemonde and Pérédée coming, she hastens from the stage.

Rosemonde has just seduced Pérédée by taking Barcée's place. She pretends she had thought him her husband. Now, she says, Pérédée must kill Alboin, or Alboin will kill him. When Pérédée, much against his will, has finally been forced to consent, Rosemonde leaves him with Almachilde, while she goes to see if the coast is clear.

Pérédée is afraid of the resentment of Gysulphe and the other Lombards, but hopes for the best. When Rosemonde returns with the information that everything is in readiness for the murder, Almachilde and Pérédée leave the stage to

commit the deed. Rosemonde then announces that she is going to marry Almachilde at once.

Albisinde, Alboin's daughter, discovers the murder, and makes a great outcry. Guérbin guesses the identity of the guilty ones and hopes to be able to punish them.

The chorus closes the act with reflections on the decadence of the times, the lack of loyalty, and the prevalence of treason. It predicts the death of the murderers.

V. Longinus (at Ravenna) is discussing with his aide, Alphonse, the fate of Alboin, an illustration of the inconsistency of fate, which affects kings more than others. Alphonse says that Longinus needs a wife to cheer him, and suggests Rosemonde as a suitable candidate. It is finally agreed that Rosemonde will be asked to poison Almachilde.

When Rosemonde and her party arrive, they are cordially welcomed. The others soon leave Rosemonde alone with Longinus, and he takes advantage of the occasion to make love to her. Flattered by the idea of becoming the wife of Longinus, Rosemonde consents to poison her lover.

Almachilde, in spite of his love for Rosemonde, is regretting the murder of the king, and when Rosemonde comes, he tells her that just a short while past in the bath he has had a premonition of coming disaster; three drops of blood fell from his nose. Rosemonde suggests a cup of wine which she has already poisoned. Almachilde discovers the poison after he has swallowed half of the potion, and makes Rosemonde drink the remainder, threatening her with his sword. Both die in great agony.

As Longinus regrets having caused their deaths, a messenger comes to tell of the death of Pérédée, who has been sent to the court of the Emperor Justinian with Albisinde. There Pérédée had killed a lion in the presence of the emperor, who had then ordered his eyes put out. Later, Pérédée had been put to death when he had stabbed two of the Emperor's men in an attempt to avenge himself.

Barcée, unable to live without her Pérédée, for whose death she feels in some degree responsible, stabs herself. Longinus then draws the moral: « The Lord always punishes those who murder kings. »

It is to be noted that, while conserving, as does Billard, many of the characteristics of the classical drama of the sixteenth century — ghosts, furies, long monologues, choruses, dreams and long discussions concerning belief in them, and insistence upon the instability of fortune, especially that of the great —, Chrestien des Croix shows in this play a conception of construction entirely different from that of Billard. The latter, following the rule of the sixteenth century (as expressed by Jean de la Taille, for instance), begins his tragedy at the very crisis, and supplies the material for five acts by a multiplication of monologues, analyses of emotions, and lamentations. Even then, he is so pressed for matter that he at times inserts wholly unrelated stories. (6) For him the tragedy consists in the deed of blood; in *Alboin* it is the death of Sysulphe and the murder of Alboin.

Chrestien des Croix, on the other hand, though he begins his play with the *hors d'œuvre* between the ghost and the fury, (7) has merely dramatized a story more or less after the fashion of the tragi-comedies. He has followed the account of Paulus Diaconus almost literally, adding only the death of Barcée. Contrary to the practice of Billard, Chrestien has endeavored to put as much of the story as possible on the stage in a fashion that reminds one of the old mystery plays, yet he has relegated the important banquet scene and the death of Pérédée to recitals, and the deception of Pérédée, quite properly, takes place just off the stage, as does the murder of Alboin. We feel in spite of this that we have at least a second-hand view of these events. The poisoning scene in the last act and the suicide of Barcée are carried out in detail on the stage. The author has, to a greater degree than Billard, relied upon multiplication of incident rather than tirades and lamentations for filling his five acts; Billard ends his tragedy with the death of Alboin, but Chrestien includes the final fate of the assassins, and tries to unify the whole by the idea that their death is a punishment for the crime of regicide.

(6) The story of Elycie and Elmechide in *Alboin*, for example.

(7) Cf. the ghost of Totyle in the first act of Billard's *Alboin*. In Comonde, Chrestien makes a much more logical choice.

Chrestien also gives evidence of the fact that he expected his plays to be acted, for there is some care for *liason* of scenes: Rosemonde, for example, sends her maid for Almachilde and occupies the time until he comes with a monologue. In another place, when Pérédée leaves for his rendezvous with Barcée, Polycrite occupies the stage long enough to permit the performance of the action which is supposed to take place and announces the coming of Pérédée and Rosemonde from the latter's room. Billard is seldom so scrupulous; scenes are placed in juxtaposition without reason, so that there is often insufficient time allowed for the action supposed to take place between scenes. (8)

Chrestien does not possess a greater power for creating convincing, motivated characters than does Billard. His personages, to an even greater degree than Billard's, are puppets, whose actions are determined only by the story which serves as a basis for the plot. Rosemonde and Almachilde are examples in point. The former shows no signs of dissatisfaction (she even says that she feels fortunate to have won Alboin) until she is forced to drink from her father's skull. Then she suddenly decides that it is her duty to avenge her father. (9) Almachilde had not previously exhibited any symptoms of affection for Rosemonde (in fact he had not yet appeared), but he is ready to declare his love and his willingness to murder Alboin. In Billard's *Alboin*, the character of Rosemonde is better motivated, for her love for Elmechide and her hatred of Alboin are represented from the very first appearance of the heroine. It must be admitted, on the other hand, that Billard has failed quite as miserably as Chrestien in the explanation of the character of Elmechide.

The style of Chrestien des Croix is somewhat simpler, less burdened with mythological allusions, less inflated and

(8) In the interval between the first and second scenes of the fifth act of *Genève* there is certainly not time for the duel which is supposed to take place.

(9) Rosemonde's dream in which Comonde appears to her to demand the death of her husband may be considered as preparation in some degree for Rosemonde's anger.

bombastic, and somewhat more realistic than Billard's. On the other hand, it is equally burdened with commonplaces. It is, moreover, almost entirely prosaic and lacks the elegiac force to be found in Billard, especially in *Panthée*; nor does the *Sieur des Croix* have a great deal to compare with the aptness of certain figures of speech to be found in Billard (10) and the lyrical charm of certain choruses such as those to be found in *Genève*.

A certain number of samples of the verse of Chrestien des Croix have already been given, but it may be well to quote a few more to enable the reader to judge for himself. The theme of the following passages was often echoed in the drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

Car tout ainsi qu'on void les pins audacieux
Dont le verdoiant chef semble voisin des Cieux
Plus agitez des vents, des foudres et tempestes
Que les petits buissons aux chevelures vertes
Les grands sentent plutost l'ineuitable éfort
De l'auengle Deese, et l'inconstant sort
Que le simple vulgaire, à qui la destinée
N'est pas si fierement contraire, et obstinée. (11)
De façon que tousiours vne extreme liesse,
Soit trauersée vn peu de legere tristesse,
Crainte que tout d'un coup le funeste mechef
Ne vienne acrauanter du bien heureux le chef,
Car tant plus qu'il se voit la fortune prospere
Tant plus il est suini d'encombre ou de misere.
Si d'aenture il monte au sommet de l'honneur,
Il voit tout en un coup raualler sa grandeur. (12)

Paul Lacroix cites the following as an example of good verse to be found in *Alboüin*:

O combien des humains la fortune est diuerse!
O comme le Destin grands et petits renuerse!
Nous montons pour descendre, et fleurissons aussi
Pour fennir et secher en ce bas monde ici...
Tout est né pour despouille aux trois Parques cruelles,
Et les prosperitez ne sont pas eternelles. (13)

(10) See above page 102.

(11) *Alboüin*, V, 1; p. 87. (12) *Ibid.*, III, 1. Both passages are classical commonplaces.

(13) *Soleinne*, vol. I, n° 923.

Chrestien is much less careful of the proprieties than Billard; he is literal to the point of being vulgar. Billard avoids all reference to the seduction scene, while Chrestien all but puts it on the stage. The most doubtful scene in all Billard's plays — one between Frédégonde and her lover, Landry, is certainly rather timid. Frédégonde speaks to Landry of their children: « Nostres, » she says, « puisqu'ils sont nais sous l'amoureux empire De vous, mon cher Landry... » (p. 68) Some of the choruses indeed speak of « deux monts de lait, » but in general one finds nothing to compare with the crudity of the scene which follows the deception of Pénélope by Rosemonde in Chrestien's *Alboïn* of the realism and licentiousness of the scene of *Amnon et Thamar* which represents Amnon in the act of driving from his bed his sister, Thamar, whom he has just violated:

Oste toy, sors d'icy, puis que j'ay fait de toy,
Je ne veux plus te voir gisante aupres de moy.

In many respects Billard is a horrible example of bad taste, but he is never sordid and vulgar in the same degree as Chrestien. His plays have a certain idealized and elevated atmosphere in keeping with the classical tendencies which is not to be found in those of Chrestien, who, nevertheless, gains in realism and naturalness.

In the final analysis, it must be admitted that the plays of Chrestien, although they have slightly more action and fewer long monologues, are scarcely an improvement over those of Billard. The talent of Chrestien as exhibited in the pastoral is perhaps more versatile; certainly the plot is more complicated and there is a mingling of the genres: farce, pastoral, tableaux, and a complication of romanesque incidents such as are to be found in a tragi-comedy.

We have hazarded the surmise that Chrestien was more popular at court than Billard. We know, however, that Billard enjoyed the protection of the duchesse de Retz and perhaps of the duc de Joyeuse, and that his tragedy, *Henry le Grand*, was favorably received by Marie de Médicis. Then he was one of the secretaries of the divorced wife of

Henry IV. He also had several friends to write for him such praise as,

A Sophocle, Euripide, & Seneque il fait honte,
Iodele, la Peruse, & Garnier il surmonte. (14)
Et nul autre que toy, d'un plus masle courage
Pouuoit bien r'animer les Princes, & les Rois,
Parce qu'on ne void point d'Euripide en cet age
Aiant l'esprit plus fort, ny plus forte la voix. (15)

Another congratulates the shades in Hades,

Puis voz maux, vos pleurs, & vos cris,
En ces beaux vers si bien escrits,
Ont encore tant d'amertume:
Que mesme aux cœurs sans passion
De Billard la puissante plume
Imprime vostre affliction. (16)

With the exception of Hardy and Montchrétien, then, Billard is of an importance at least equal to that of any dramatist of his time whose works have come down to us. Because of the mere fact of his having enjoyed so important a position in his own time, Billard acquires a right to a greater consideration in the history of the French stage.

(14) Habert, p. iv, in the edition of Billard's plays of 1610.

(15) Desonan, p. v, in same.

(16) Motin, p. vii, in same.

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